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Water pillow softens pain in the neck

A new water-filled pillow (Mediflow Waterbase Pillow) may be more beneficial for patients with neck pain than the usually recommended roll pillow, says Marco Pappagallo, MD.

The new head-rest *(right)*, which looks like a typical pillow, has a thin water bag in its base. Patients add 2 quarts of water if they want a soft pillow and 4 quarts if they want more firm support.

Pappagallo and colleagues tested the pillow on 41 patients (mean age: 48) who had been suffering from neck pain anywhere from 1 to 25 years. Twenty-three subjects had experienced neck pain daily; the rest had neck pain at least once a week. Twenty-nine said that their pain caused them to wake up during the night.

During the study, all patients slept on their own standard pillow for 1 week. Next, they slept on either a roll pillow or the water pillow for 2 weeks. Finally, they switched to the other pillow for 2 weeks. Patients completed questionnaires each morning. Findings:

PAIN. The water pillow provided more overall satisfaction. In the mornings, pain intensity was less with the water pillow than with the standard and roll pillows.

SLEEP. The water pillow was better at helping provide sleep and rest than the standard pillow. With the standard and roll pillows, there were no differences in the length of time it took to fall asleep, in the number of awakenings during the night, and in the difficulty of falling back asleep.

Several patients complained about the roll pillow, and many had to stop using it because they said it made their pain worse. Patients reported that roll pillows are difficult to keep in place. They also flatten out and provide inadequate head and neck support.

"The water pillow provides the most benefit to patients who have axial neck pain," Pappagallo told MODERN MEDICINE. "The best candidates are patients who have pain that doesn't radiate to the upper extremities. Pain that radiates as such implies that there is a root irritation. The water pillow can also help some patients whose neck pain causes headache."

This study appears in the February edition of the *Archives of Physical and Medical Rehabilitation.*

The Mediflow Waterbase Pillow may help alleviate patients' chronic neck pain while they sleep. The water bag is in the base of the pillow, surrounded by a thermal reflector blanket that traps the heat.

Photo courtesy of Mediflow, Inc.

The water pillow costs $50, plus $5 for shipping and handling. It can be purchased by calling (888) 763-3435. Some pharmacies are also carrying the pillow.

Dr. Pappagallo is an assistant professor of neurology, neurosurgery, and anesthesia at the Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore.

Post-menopausal estrogen prevents dry and wrinkled skin

Post-menopausal estrogen therapy appears to have yet another benefit for women: preventing dry skin and wrinkling.

Gail A. Greendale, MD, and colleagues conducted a cross-sectional analysis of 3,875 post-menopausal women (84% white) who were enrolled in the First National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES I). All of the women, aged 40 and older, underwent dermatologic exams and assessments of their exposure to sunlight.

Data on estrogen use was obtained on 3,403 of the women (88%) from follow-up surveys for the period between 1982 and '86. Some 1,132 (33%) of the women had senile dry skin, 499 (15%) had skin atrophy, and 880 (26%) had wrinkled skin. These conditions were less prevalent in blacks than whites.

After adjusting for age, body mass, and sunlight exposure, the researchers found that post-menopausal estrogen significantly reduced the likelihood of senile dry skin and